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SUBJECT: DEBATE ON AUSTRIAN MUSLIM COMMUNITY

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#### Summary

1. (U) In the aftermath of the London terror attacks, public debate in Austria has focused on the situation of its Muslim community. Interior Ministry officials stress that there are only a few radical elements in the community and that the GoA is closely monitoring extremist elements. The official representation of Muslims in Austria, the "Islamic Religious Community" (IGG) maintains that "98 percent of mosques" follow the IGG's course. End Summary.

#### View from the Interior Ministry

2. (U) Commenting on the threat level in Austria, Interior Ministry (MoI) officials emphasized that there are a few radicals in the Islamic Community. However, the MoI said that it is closely monitoring these individuals and groups. The MoI maintained that there are "fewer than five mosques" where radical Imams are active.

#### View from the Muslim Community

3. (U) During a July 14 television interview, Omar al-Rawi, spokesman for the IGG, claimed that there are four mosques in Austria where "radical views" exist. IGG President Anas Schakfeh noted that "98 percent" of mosques followed the IGG's course. He admitted a small group of radical Imams did not cooperate with the IGG. Schakfeh noted that the IGG works closely with the MoI in regards to extremist activity in the Muslim community. Public Director for Security Erik Buxbaum said that cooperation with the IGG in this area was satisfactory.

4. (U) Al-Rawi also called on the Muslim community to take action and adopt preventive measures against terrorism. Al-Rawi referred to an April 24 declaration from a group of Austrian imams, which clearly distanced the community from extremism and exhorted Muslims to focus on mutual respect, tolerance and rejection of terrorism. Nevertheless, al-Rawi called on the community to be more proactive. A simple condemnation of terrorist attacks is not sufficient.

#### View from Chancellor Schuessel

5. (U) In a July 16 interview, Chancellor Wolfgang Schuessel praised the GoA's intensive cooperation with the IGG and other religious communities. He added that it is also essential to strengthen the self-cleansing forces within the Islamic Community. He warned that there are no absolute guarantees concerning terrorism, but he lauded the work of security authorities and urged ordinary citizens to become more vigilant.

#### Comment

6. (SBU) The approximately 339,000 Muslims in Austria, representing 4.2% of the population, are Austria's second-largest religious group. They come primarily from Turkey and the former Yugoslavia. The Muslim faith is among the 13 recognized religious societies, and has had this status since 1912. Due to this status, the Muslim community has an official representation, the IGG, which is the GoA's partner on issues of cooperation. Despite a positive relationship between the GoA and the Muslim Community, and the community's overall moderate orientation, Austrian intelligence officials have publicly warned that several extremist organizations and movements are also represented through individual activists in Austria. There have been numerous media stories on this issue, but no reported incidents of backlash violence against Muslims.

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